

# THE BOSTON INFORMER

No. 108

The newsletter for people who care about Boston

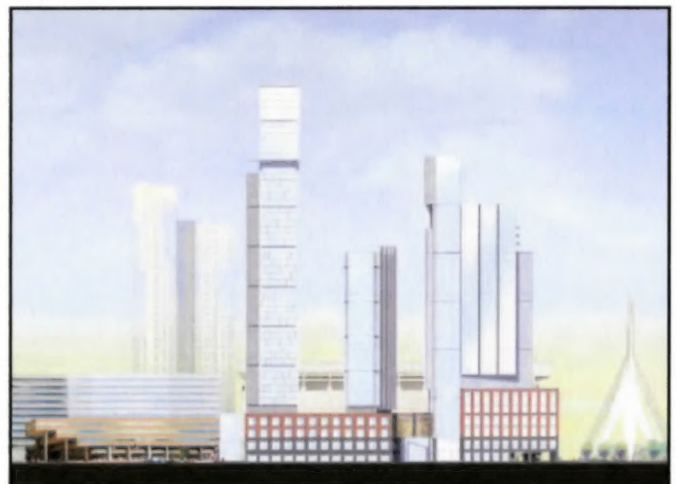
Fall 2013

## Menino's 20-year Development Legacy

For those who have not been in Metropolitan Boston or seen a newspaper, trade journal or real estate blog in the past six months, scores of development projects have been submitted to the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) since March 28, 2013, the date Mayor Menino announced that he was not running for reelection. The immediate response from every developer (other than Don Chiofaro) has been to come up with new plans which can get approval by the present boards, staff and mayor since a new administration could (will) lead to personnel changes at the BRA and other approval agencies.

The flurry of activity has seen the BRA Board meet more than three times a month instead of its usual monthly meeting, and the Boston Civic Design Committee (BCDC) has been holding marathon evening meetings to complete its project reviews. The Boston Globe reported that in the four months (April–July) after the announcement by Menino to not seek reelection, a plethora of proposals has shown up at City Hall with an estimated \$4 billion in private investment including office towers, hotels and more than 5,000 units of housing. The pace has continued since July with Harvard University ramping up again at its Allston campus, a re-do of the 600-foot tower at Copley Place, hotel and residences at Trinity Place, TD Garden Development and the Government Center Garage development.

The flood of development projects seeking approval seems to be somewhat random, not connected to a comprehensive



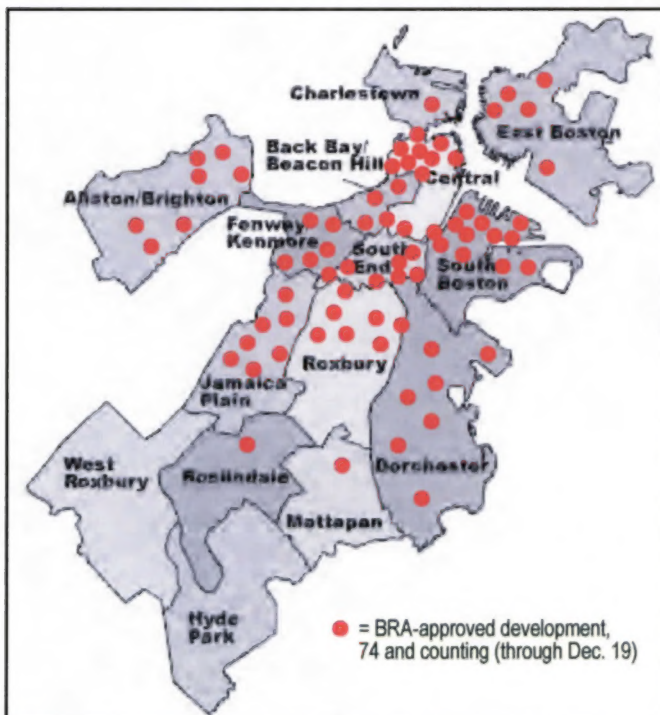
The proposed Boston Garden mixed-use project has over 1.8 million square feet total; 497 residential units, 306 hotel rooms and office and retail, including a supermarket. The tower would rise 600 feet, about the height of One International Place. Approved by BRA Dec. 19 with \$7.8 million in tax breaks.

plan other than Menino's call to build 30,000 housing units by 2020. The City of Boston does not seem to have an overall Master Plan to assist in decision making by the proponent and the reviewers, a fact that became a drumbeat struck by many mayoral candidates including Mayor-elect Walsh. Proposed developments being advanced seem to be "spot" planning as compared to "spot" zoning and will make an interesting map once many are approved by the BRA before January 6.

Mayor-elect Walsh has proposed major changes to the BRA, starting with consolidating development functions under a new Boston Economic Development Authority (BEDA) and separating planning and research from development. Walsh proposes the new BEDA head be more independent, given a contract with a term and compensation commensurate with police and fire commissioners and school superintendent. Walsh will determine if this new development chief should be a administrator or a builder, and this first new chief will set the tone for the authority for years to come.

After the race for approvals ends, will Boston end up with a glut in the office, hotel and residential markets within three years (just before the next election) and leave the City with empty buildings and underdeveloped systems? Or will the trends that show only about 10 percent of proposed projects come to fruition continue? The 2009 recession pushed construction costs down 20 percent, but construction costs are rising now and will continue as proposed plans become reality.

The changing of the guard will change the way the BRA operates for the first time in 20 years. The number of projects in the ground versus approved projects will be different, but for how long will be the big question.



Development projects approved by the Boston Redevelopment Authority since Mayor Menino announced on March 28, 2013, he would retire after his fifth term.



## Boston Public Library Johnson Building, Copley Square

Design for a \$16 million renovation project at the Boston Public Library Johnson Building has proceeded apace with the internal revisions to the building to begin in December 2013. The contract is already out to relocate some of the books and shelves to make way for the new teen room at the second level and a new children's library. New restrooms on the second floor are one of the most welcome additions of this Phase 1 renovation project.



The granite screens on the Boston Public Library Johnson Building on Boylston and Exeter streets would be removed to let light in.

While the planning process has been ongoing for the past year, the

"big" idea seems to be the removal of the granite screens which are found on Boylston and Exeter streets. Simple removal of the granite screens seems a bit tame, but planning for changes to the ground-floor designs in the coming months might consider an easier access to the Johnson Building and more street-oriented uses for this entry area, e.g. café, exhibition space. There may also be an opportunity to open up the area along Boylston and Exeter streets to an outdoor exhibit space with landscaping and site furniture (other than the present coin-operated toilet). Since changes to the Johnson Building were first announced, officials have described later phases as much less certain.

Next Community Advisory Committee meeting (open to the public) is January 15, 2014, from 9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. Architect: William Rawn Associates; Landscape Architect: Reed Hildebrand.



Rendering of Johnson Building with granite screens removed and lights as bright as an amusement park.

Source: William Rawn Assoc. Architects

## Transportation Plan for the Seaport District

A Better City, in conjunction with Massport, the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, the City of Boston and MassDOT, will manage efforts to develop a comprehensive transportation plan for the Seaport (Innovation) District to fight increasingly congestion approaching gridlock at peak hours. A Request for Proposals for the South Boston Waterfront Transportation Plan was released in the fall and VHB, a transportation planning and engineering firm, was selected. The \$1 million study, principally funded by MassDOT, is expected to take about one year. A Steering Committee of representatives of the sponsoring agencies plus the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the Federal Court, and MBTA will be set up. An interagency Working Group of "key staff of participating organizations" will work with the consultant team. Opportunities for the public to participate will include focus groups, charrettes, meetings and website.

In the meantime, small steps to alleviate traffic congestion will be implemented, such as better directional road striping on the Moakley

Bridge, "Don't Block the Box" road stripes at intersections, better traffic signal timing, etc. Also, the BRA is procuring two water ferries for service between South Boston and East Boston, hoping to launch in 2014.

Unfortunately, like most city plans, the study is too narrow. Traffic leaving the Seaport District using the bridges joins and is hampered by traffic from the downtown, North Station and waterfront areas. The study is the first look at transportation needs in the Seaport District since the South Boston Transportation Summit, a multi-agency study of transit and transportation needs done in 2000. One of the conclusions of that study was that the MBTA Silver Line would not be adequate to meet demand for transit as the Seaport District grows. The scope of work in the Request for Proposals mentions private shuttle buses repeatedly, which are great until they hit peak-hour gridlock.



South Boston Waterfront Transportation Plan Study Area

## Boston Convention & Exhibition Center Expansion

The Massachusetts Convention Center Authority (MCCA) is asking the Legislature for approval for \$1 billion expansion of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in South Boston. The expansion would increase the meeting exhibit space by 60 percent (1.3 million s.f.). The Center, with 2.1 million s.f. of flexible space, was built at a cost of \$850 million and opened in June 2004.

MCCA stated the expansion is needed because Boston miss-

es out on 14 to 17 large conventions per year because the existing Center is not big enough. The expansion reportedly would require no new taxes, but could be financed from the increased revenue from existing taxes on hotel rooms, rental cars and other services which have grown due to increased business travel and tourism.

Also, the MCCA is looking for new hotels to be built near the Convention Center, with a major proposal for a 1,500-room hotel complex which would require substantial public money.



## Northern Avenue Bridge Restored...for Auto Traffic?

—Once again the Boston Public Works Department (BPWD) is planning to restore the Old Northern Avenue Bridge that connects Atlantic Avenue to Northern Avenue in the Seaport District by raising it 8 feet, 8 inches so it will be the same height as the neighboring Evelyn Moakley Bridge (to allow limited ship navigation) and restoring three channels on it. The new proposal is for two lanes for vehicles and bicycle lanes and one for pedestrians. This is virtually the same proposal floated in 2003, but without the glass-enclosed art gallery in the center and with two travel lanes instead of a single reversible lane. And no one cared about bike lanes in 2003.

The theory is that the new vehicle lanes would help alleviate the current traffic congestion coming out of the Seaport District, although it will feed into another traffic jam on Atlantic Avenue and Surface Boulevard. (see also in this issue, South Boston Transportation Plan). In any case, the Federal Government will only help finance the bridge restoration if it includes vehicular traffic. The City will not advance the project without Federal funding.

Preliminary cost estimates are about \$52 million, up from \$35 million in 2003. It could be as long as five years before funds become available. In the meantime the City will pay for the difficult and expensive maintenance to ensure the bridge is still able to be opened, which is required by the Coast Guard.

Source: © Schwartz/Silver Architects Inc./Fay, Spofford & Thorndike



## What's Up?

### 100 Huntington Avenue: Simon Copley Place Expansion

—The 52-story addition to Copley Place at the corner of Dartmouth Street and Huntington Avenue is about to begin construction following approval by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in October.

The 625-foot residential and commercial tower is proposed to have 433 apartments and 109 condominium residences as well as expanded retail at the base of the building. The earlier approved version was for 47 stories and a more aggressive commercial retail increase at the lower floors. The original proposed tower height was also 625 feet but had taller retail/commercial floors. The revised building complex will contain a minimum of 71 affordable units and the developer, Simon's is paying to mitigate some of the impacts on the area with contributions to the Southwest Corridor (\$250,000), public art (\$1 million) and Copley Square contribution of \$250,000. No additional parking is being contemplated for the 542 units and commercial uses and the final transportation details are still being resolved.

The construction is estimated at more than \$500 million and will take about three years to complete once begun.

Architect: Elkus Manfredi.

**Parcel 25 BPS School Plans**—Long considered a no-man's land, the area south of Kneeland Street amid a tangle of highway ramps could be transformed in five years into a hub of housing and education. The City of Boston is proceeding with planning, permitting, design and land acquisition for what could be the state's most expensive school ever. The proposal is a \$261 million new school building to house the Josiah Quincy Upper School and the Boston Arts Academy on MassDOT Parcel 25 in Chinatown. The parcel is bounded by Kneeland Street, Parcel 24 on Hudson Street and Central Artery highway ramps.

The state has unsuccessfully attempted to find a developer for the parcel several times be-

fore. The site is encumbered by highway ramps that would require at minimum a cover or infrastructure to allow development above.

The proposed grades 6-12 school would consolidate students from three buildings, with Boston Arts Academy enrollment at 710 students and Quincy School at 650 students. The goal is to be under construction in 2014 and open for students in fall 2017. The architect is HMFH of Cambridge.

The adjacent Parcel 24 on Hudson Street, a project of the New Boston Fund and Asian Community Development Corp., has begun construction of the first building. This 21-story building will have 217 market-rate rental units and 95 afford-

able rental units. An adjacent low-rise building with 50 affordable condominiums will be built after 2015.



Source: ADD Inc.



MassDOT Parcel 25, proposed site of \$261 million Boston Public School. The amount the state will fund is unclear. MassDOT photo.



# Menino Wrap-Up: 20 Years are Over

## A Short Retrospective of Mayor Thomas M. Menino



Boston's longest-serving Mayor is obviously a survivor. Mayor Menino has survived recessions, the Big Dig, the Boston Harbor cleanup, the Democratic National Convention, Marathon bombings and lockdowns and much more. But Menino can also be seen as a guy in the right place at the right time and the one who took advantage of every opportunity to do something he thought was for the good of the City.

Not one to inflate egos, The Boston Informer believes in putting the Menino legacy into perspective for the sake of posterity. This commemorative insert looks squarely at the Menino years for his accomplishments, those plans or initiatives not done, and what projects happened in Boston that the mayor did not control but which made a huge difference. Many of these projects, most notably the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway and the Boston Harbor cleanup, were done completely by others. Menino leveraged these projects and took credit.



### Accomplishments

- ◆ Buildout of Seaport (Innovation) District [Fan Pier, office buildings, hotels, restaurants, etc.]
- ◆ Redevelopment of Lower Washington Street [Ritz-Carlton; Paramount, Opera House, Modern theaters; Millennium Place, Kensington; Registry of Motor Vehicles; etc.]
- ◆ Increased City's supply of office space from 49 million s.f. to 61 million s.f.



- ◆ Redevelopment of Filene's site in Downtown Crossing
- ◆ Dudley Square School Department HQ
- ◆ Downtown Business Improvement District
- ◆ Finally recognized that bikes exist

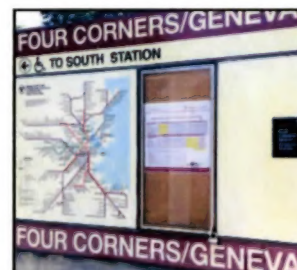
### Did Not Accomplish

- ◆ Hub Ticket redevelopment
- ◆ New Fenway Park
- ◆ Moving City Hall to South Boston
- ◆ Revitalization of City Hall Plaza
- ◆ Winthrop Sq. 1,000-ft. tower
- ◆ Hinge Block redevelopment
- ◆ Renovating Old Northern Avenue Bridge
- ◆ Development of East Boston Waterfront [partially done]
- ◆ Aquaculture
- ◆ North Station/North End supermarket
- ◆ Development of Sargents Wharf
- ◆ South Bay Harbor Trail
- ◆ Linking the Corridors bike path
- ◆ Revitalize City Hall Plaza
- ◆ Crossroads street reconstruction
- ◆ Tremont Street Boulevard projects (two)
- ◆ Commonwealth Avenue (BU Bridge-Packards Corner) Boulevard project



### Projects Not Controlled By Mayor

- ◆ Big Dig (MassHighway, MassPike, Metropolitan Highway System)
- ◆ Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway (MassPike, MassDOT)
- ◆ Boston Harbor Cleanup (MWRA)
- ◆ Deer Island Sewage Treatment Plant (MWRA)
- ◆ South Boston Convention Center (MCCA)
- ◆ City Square, Charlestown (MassPike)
- ◆ Zakim Bridge (MassHighway)
- ◆ Silver Line (MBTA)



- ◆ Fairmount Line (MBTA)
- ◆ Logan Airport (Massport)
- ◆ South Boston beaches (DCR and MWRA)
- ◆ East Boston Piers Park (Massport)
- ◆ East Boston Bremen Street Park (MassHighway and Massport)



# THE BOSTON INFORMER

A publication of ATC Information, Inc.

## Welcome to The Boston Informer

The goal is simple: Provide concise public information on construction projects, planning initiatives, and whatever else affects living and working in Boston. Welcome to The Boston Informer!

The Boston Informer is published electronically by ATC Information, Inc., five times yearly in Boston, Mass. President: Anthony Casendino; vice-presidents, Anne McKinnon, Chris Fincham.

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*City of Boston employees leaving City Hall  
after 20 years...*



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**Brave New World: Life after two decades  
in City Hall. "I hear there are jobs in the  
'Innovation District.' Where is it?"**

## You Were Asking

- Q. Another year gone and no development at the Hub Ticket site. What's up?**
- A.** The comedy of the redevelopment of 240 Tremont St. continues. Amherst Media received tentative designation in August 2005 to develop a three-story building at the former Hub Ticket site next to the Wilbur Theater. The latest plan is a 21-story hotel with 202 rooms, retail, restaurant, and a 3-story digital sign. OTO Development, hotel developers, has joined Amherst Media, whose tentative designation has been extended about every six months since 2006 with the current extension ending Jan. 31, 2014.
- Q. City's Bike Network Plan is finally done after more than 2 1/2 years. I am hoping all the streets reconstructed under Menino's 1996 Boulevard Program will be improved.**
- A.** The interactive map on the Boston Bikes website shows existing, 5-year and 30-year bike proposed networks. A few Boulevard Program streets that were redesigned in the 1990s ignoring bikes—Brighton Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue, for example—might be improved...in 30 years. But Huntington Avenue and Hyde Park Avenue, both narrowed to squeeze bikes—show no improvements proposed.
- Q. A recent BRA e-mail to members of the Impact Advisory Group for the Boston Garden Project suggested trying to limit public attendance at the next meeting to avoid "rabble rousing." I'm a member of the public; does the BRA consider me to be rabble?**
- A.** Of course.
- Q. I heard MassDOT will run the Silver Line to Chelsea from So. Station. This will be the fourth line called the Silver Line. Why not call it something else?**
- A.** MassDOT seems to think any service using a bus lane should be a Silver Line. Yes, it's confusing. The Chelsea Silver Line will operate like the Airport Silver Line and then peel off at Logan to access exclusive rights of way in East Boston and Chelsea. MassDOT says this \$40 million to \$85 million project will be complete in fall 2016....

## PEOPLE MOVERS

- Deborah Hadden**, from Massport deputy port director to port director.
- Larry English**, from Cambridge Systematics to Nelson\Nygaard.
- Ray Johnson** retired from Mass. Housing Finance Agency.
- Frank Astone**, from Jacobs to AECOM.
- Joanne Haracz**, from AECOM to McMahon Associates.
- Clarence 'Jeep' Jones** retired as chair of the BRA Board.
- Michael Monahan**, head of a local in the Electrical Workers union, was appointed to the BRA Board.
- Nancy Girard**, former executive director of the New Hampshire office of the Conservation Law Foundation, is the new commissioner of Boston's Environment Dept.